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TAGS: [ECON](#) [KDEM](#) [KZ](#) [OSCE](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#)
SUBJECT: SCHOOL OF HARD KNOCKS: BECOMING A LIBERAL
POLITICIAN IN NORTHERN KAZAKHSTAN

REF: A. ASTANA 2222
[1](#)B. ASTANA 3025

Classified By: Ambassador John Ordway, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Young, U.S.-educated and fed up with local corruption, Viktor Frolov wants to enter politics and change the way things are done in his native Petropavlovsk (capital of Northern Kazakhstan oblast). Frolov told Econoff that, despite being defeated in his first campaign for the Petropavlovsk City Maslikhat (city council), he aspires to run again. Although he most closely identifies himself with the opposition Ak Zhol, Frolov has chosen to direct his pursuits through the ruling Nur Otan. He sees his region as one with an increasingly disaffected population and no functioning political opposition. Frolov's travails present an interesting microcosm of the political realities in Northern Kazakhstan oblast. End summary.

Pick Your Party

[1](#)2. (C) In a December 15 conversation with Econoff, Viktor Frolov, an ethnic Russian native of Petropavlovsk, made it clear that his political perspective was largely defined by the year he spent studying in the United States as an undergraduate on a U.S.-funded program. By the time of the August elections, Frolov had been preparing for a run for the Petropavlovsk City Maslikhat for some time. Ideologically, he most closely identifies himself with Ak Zhol (Econoff first met Frolov when visiting the Petropavlovsk Ak Zhol campaign headquarters in early August in the run-up to the Parliamentary elections, ref A). However, Frolov never officially joined Ak Zhol due to his conviction that an affiliation with the opposition would prevent him from getting elected. Instead, in early 2008, with the encouragement from the city akim, Frolov joined Nur Otan, hoping to build his political career from within the ruling party.

[1](#)3. (C) Upon joining Nur Otan, the twenty-something Frolov was immediately made a member of the 12-member "politburo" of Nur Otan's Petropavlovsk branch. Nevertheless, Frolov's ambitions to run in the August election on the Nur Otan ticket for the city maslikhat were dashed. Frolov told Econoff that, although his candidacy was supported by the city akim, the oblast akim struck it down. The reason, Frolov explained, was that he "had nothing to lose" and was therefore difficult to control. Without a substantial stake in the "system" (such as owning his own business), Frolov was deemed by the oblast akim as not subject to leverage and potentially too independent.

Run on Your Own

14. (C) Undeterred (and without leaving Nur Otan), Frolov proceeded to run for the city maslikhat as an independent. He and his supporters canvassed the neighborhoods of his city district, talking to residents and handing out campaign materials. The issues were local: repairing buildings, constructing a playground, etc. Frolov told Econoff that he came under some pressure from the local authorities to pull out. His supervisor at the bank was asked to coerce Frolov to abandon his pursuit. To this, Frolov said, his boss had a "clever" response: he (falsely) claimed that he was powerless to act against Frolov, because the latter had strong links to the bank's leadership in Almaty.

15. (C) Frolov echoed the claim made to Econoff by the Petropavlovsk Ak Zhol leader in August that all the local election results were drawn up in the oblast maslikhat a month or two before the election (ref A). Other local opposition-minded candidates (all running as independents) were, Frolov said, pressured to withdraw or even stricken from the ballot. The oblast akim, Frolov claimed, violated the law by openly campaigning for Nur Otan. Many businesses, including Frolov's own bank, called their employees and pressured them to show up at the polls. Frolov was told by the authorities not to bother fielding observers at two of his district's four polling stations. At the end of the day, he garnered 29% of the vote, with the Nur Otan candidate winning over 60%, and the rest going to a "stand-in, sacrificial lamb" candidate. Of the 19 seats in the city Maslikhat, Frolov said, 18 went to Nur Otan, with the remaining seat going to a "token" independent with no ties to the opposition.

Savor the Frustration

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16. (C) Frolov stated to Econoff that he is happy with his career in banking but remains determined to enter politics. Many people in the largely ethnic-Russian Northern Kazakhstan oblast are, according to Frolov, increasingly unhappy with the current state of affairs. Endemic corruption and preferences for ethnic Kazakhs in hiring are, he said, fueling public unease. Emigration to Russia from the oblast is continuing. Frolov stated that the removal of Tair Mansurov, the oblast akim, in October drew a sign of relief from the local business community, which resented Mansurov's penchant for extracting money from businesses. (Note: Mansurov has since been appointed the General Secretary of the Eurasian Economic Community, "EurAsEc," which includes Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. End note.) On the other hand, Frolov added, Mansurov's replacement, his former deputy Serik Bilyalov, is a "nobody" and does not inspire confidence. At the same time, the political situation in the oblast is becoming "harsher": every single local newspaper issue is read and pre-approved by oblast authorities prior to publication; Nur Otan is increasingly acting as the sole party in power and calling the shots by itself. The oblast authorities, according to Frolov, routinely compel local businesses, particularly banks, to provide money for various public projects, though the recent financial turmoil (ref B) has abated these pressures. Government jobs, he added, are routinely "purchased." Frolov stated that young people who come back to Petropavlovsk after studying in the U.S. are "incensed" by the corruption they see.

...And Run, Run Again

17. (C) With the next Petropavlovsk city maslikhat election nearly five years away, Frolov's main hope is that one of the maslikhat's seats becomes vacated early. (Note: Candidates for the Petropavlovsk city maslikhat must be residents of the city but not necessarily of the district they are vying to

represent. End note.) In the meantime, Frolov said, he remains in the Nur Otan politburo, which "hypocritically" approves any proposal that comes before it. Frolov stated that he is presently laying the groundwork for a political career by building connections. For now, he believes that Nur Otan is his best bet for getting elected as a member of the city maslikhat. He noted that the law allows a maslikhat deputy (though not a Mazhilis deputy) to leave his party after being elected and still retain his seat.

Comment

18. (C) Frolov's travails present a good cross-section of the political realities in the Northern Kazakhstan oblast, which -- under the thumb of the recently departed akim Tair Mansurov -- earned the reputation of being a tightly controlled one (ref A). The increasingly close marriage of the ruling Nur Otan with the government, the virtually unbridled powers enjoyed by the oblast akim, the rampant corruption, and the nearly complete impotence of the local opposition are the common threads running through Frolov's story and that of his oblast.
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